



HK today



Social Issues

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Shocking connection between inner-city teens' aggression and soft-drinks

# Sodas and violence linked



**R**esearchers in the United States say they have found a "shocking"

association - if only a statistical one - between violence by teenagers and the amount of soda they drink.

High-school students in inner-city Boston who consumed more than five cans of non-diet, fizzy soft drinks every week were between nine and 15 per cent more likely to engage in an aggressive act than peers who drank less.

"What we found was that there was a strong link between how many soft drinks these inner-city kids consumed and how violent they were, not only in violence

against peers but also violence in dating relationships, and against siblings," said David Hemenway, a professor at the Harvard School of Public Health.

"It was shocking to us when we saw how clear the relationship was."

But he said that only further work would confirm or disprove whether higher consumption of sweet sodas caused violent behaviour.

The new study was based on answers to questionnaires filled out by 1,878 public-school students aged 14 to 18 in the inner Boston area, where Hemenway said crime rates were much higher than in the wealthier suburbs. Most respondents were Hispanic, African-American or mixed; few were Asian or white.

**There was a strong link between how many soft drinks these kids consumed and how violent they were**

Among the questions were how much carbonated non-diet soft drinks, measured in 355-millilitre cans, the teens had drunk in the previous seven days.

They were also asked whether they drank alcohol or smoked, carried a weapon or showed violence towards peers, family members or partners. What emerged, said Hemenway, was evidence of "dose response", in

other words, the more soda was consumed, the more likely the tendency towards violence.

Among those who drank one or no cans of soft drink a week, 23 per cent carried a gun or a knife; 15 per cent perpetrated violence towards a partner; and 35 per cent had been violent towards peers.

Conversely, among those who drank 14 cans a week, 43 per cent carried a gun or a knife; 27 per cent had been violent towards a partner; and more than 58 per cent had been violent towards peers. Overall, teens who were heavy consumers of sugary fizz were between nine and 15 percentage points more likely to show aggressive behaviour compared with low consumers, even with ethnicity and other factors accounted for.